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## Ten California Courts Win Top Awards

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### Judicial Council Kleps Awards Honor Outstanding Court Programs

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Los Angeles—The Judicial Council of California today announced the recipients of the 2003 Ralph N. Kleps Awards for Improvement in Administration of the Courts, an annual awards program recognizing innovation in the state's courts.

Selected from a field of 38 nominations, the council selected 10 exemplary programs for awards that will be presented at the California Judicial Administration Conference (CJAC), scheduled for February 23–27, 2003.

Created in 1991 in honor of Ralph N. Kleps, the first administrative director of the California courts, the awards are given in five categories, according to the number of authorized judicial positions in each group. Programs nominated for the awards are judged on four criteria. The programs must:

- Be a project of a California court.
- Reflect the intent of at least one of the six goals of the Judicial Council's strategic plan (access, fairness, and diversity; independence and accountability; modernization of management and administration; quality of justice and service to the public; education; and technology).
- Be innovative.
- Have results, outcomes, or benefits that demonstrate an impact on the court and the public it serves.
- Be replicable in other courts.

Summaries of the winning programs follow.

### 2003 KLEPS AWARD WINNERS

#### *Category 1 (2-6 AJPs)*

##### **Night Court for Child Support Calendar:** Superior Court of Inyo County

This unique court combines a dedicated child support calendar in a night court setting that allows working parents to attend without being adversely impacted economically. The efficiency and effectiveness of the court is enhanced by the increased participation by parents and by the availability of additional resources such as the Family Law Facilitator.

##### **Visual Guides to the Courts:** Superior Court of Siskiyou County

The court produced visual storytelling brochures that walk litigants through 8 subject areas of the legal system. In order to design them from the public's perspective, it organized seven public forums around the county, collaborated with other agencies and stakeholders in the justice system, and met with representatives of different cultures in the community. The court distributed the guides at courthouses, family resource centers, public health and mental health organizations, hospitals and clinics, schools, nonprofit social service agencies, public libraries, law libraries, law enforcement agencies, the local bar association, and Native American tribal communities. Six of the guides have been translated into Spanish.

## **Category 2 (7-19 AJPs)**

### **Guardianship Facilitation and Outreach:** Superior Court of Yolo County

This guardianship clinic, facilitated by a court staff attorney, assists pro per grandparents and other caretakers with the guardianship process. The goals of the program are to provide permanency for children and their caregivers, prevent parental abuse and neglect, and reduce the trauma and expense of dependency proceedings. The staff attorney and Judge Donna M. Petre, co-presiding judge of Yolo County's Unified Family Court, publicize the guardianship program to government agencies, child protection groups, grandparents' advocates, and other interested organizations. As a result, guardianship petitions have increased by more than 100 percent since the program began in 1999.

## **Category 3 (20-49 AJPs)**

### **Spanish Self-Help Center:** Superior Court of Fresno County

Since 1990, the number of Hispanic residents in Fresno County has increased by 48.6 percent, and this group now represents 44 percent of the total population. In an effort to provide equal access to all residents, the court's self-help center assists the underserved

Spanish pro per litigant population by offering educational information and language

assistance. Centro de Recursos Legales provides:

- Daily access to Spanish language self-help instructions for family law, unlawful detainer, civil harassment, and guardianship issues;
- Review of legal documents by a court examiner;
- Access to family law clinics; and
- In-court interpreter assistance.

### **EZLegalFile Service Bureau:** Superior Court of San Mateo County

The EZLegalFile Service Bureau is an Internet-based, interactive program that allows litigants to complete Judicial Council forms in family law, small claims, or unlawful detainer cases. The San Mateo court developed the bureau, which is available to any trial court in the state, in response to requests from other courts that wanted to provide the same access to citizens in their counties. To date, 12 superior courts representing more than 20 percent of the state's population have joined the EZLegalFile Service Bureau. As of June 2002, more than 15,000 litigants throughout California have completed their forms using EZLegalFile. In addition, the AOC recently awarded the San Mateo court a grant to expand the number of EZLegalFile partner courts to 24.

### **Tip of the Day Radio Program:** Superior Court of Ventura County

The Tip of the Day program consists of five-minute public service radio announcements live in Spanish Monday through Friday at 10:30 a.m. on KOXR, a Spanish-language radio station. The court started the program in mid-2002 as a way to promote the court's no-cost self-help legal access centers. Topics are chosen from questions that have previously been raised by people seeking help at the centers. Each tip is intended to provide general information to the community while also informing citizens of the wide range of services and programs offered by the court. Since the program was implemented, the number of people seeking assistance at the self-help legal access center in La Colonia, the predominately Spanish-speaking neighborhood of Oxnard, has more than doubled.

## **Category 4 (50+ AJP)**

### **Teachers' Courthouse Seminar:** Superior Court of Los Angeles County

The Teachers' Courthouse Seminar brings high school government teachers to a local courthouse for a one-day, interactive observation of the criminal justice system. The seminar provides teachers with accurate information about the trial courts and about their function in the criminal justice system. The program also provides educational materials about the courts that teachers can use in their classrooms. These include an interactive CD-ROM, titled *The Court in Action: Spotlight on the Criminal Justice Process*, which helps high school teachers to explain the work of the criminal courts to their government classes.

**Interactive Community Assistance Network (I-CAN!):** Superior Court of Orange County

The project, implemented in 2000 in partnership with the Legal Aid Society of Orange County, is a network of web-based legal services and interactive kiosks that assist self-represented litigants. I-CAN!'s multilingual, interactive, and tutorial modules enable self-represented litigants to create properly formatted pleadings and complete legal forms using a touch screen or Web interface. Users are able to obtain immediate technical assistance from Legal Aid staff by using Internet phone technology that has been integrated into the system. Currently, the Orange County court has 13 modules that are available in English and Spanish, and 5 that offer instruction in Vietnamese. The I-CAN! system is used in nine other counties and is proposed for use in seven others. In addition, courts in Oklahoma, Massachusetts, and Virginia have funded I-CAN! projects of their own, while New York, Minnesota, and the District of Columbia have applied for similar funds.

**Category 5 (Appellate Courts)**

**Step by Step Civil Appellate Manual:** Court of Appeal, Fourth District

The manual instructs self-represented litigants who are undertaking an appeal on how to proceed in the Fourth Appellate District, Division One. In addition, the appendix provides a wealth of forms and samples. The manual is being used as text in a course on appellate practice given by the San Diego County Public Law Library. It is available in a print version, free of charge, and is on the court's Web site.

**The Courts as Curriculum:** Court of Appeal, Fifth Appellate District

In an unprecedented outreach effort, the Fifth Appellate District combined its "The Courts as Curriculum" program with the California Supreme Court's special session of its oral argument calendar held in Fresno. More than 100 students were able to attend the session held at the appellate court, and it was broadcast live on television, allowing thousands of individuals an opportunity to see the court in action. Days before the Supreme Court's October 8–9, 2002, session, justices from the Fifth Appellate District participated in a panel discussion with high-school students about the judicial process. That discussion was videotaped and made available to Central Valley high schools to prepare for the special Supreme Court session. In addition, Kern County educators worked with the appellate court to prepare a study guide, available on the Internet, that provided the history of the Supreme Court and some of the legal issues it would confront during its arguments.

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